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MEA: SUDAN SITUATION TENSE, SAFETY OF INDIANS PRIORITY

The Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday that various options are being worked out to ensure the safety of Indians stranded in Sudan. Delhi is keeping a close watch on developments in the violence-hit country and will implement evacuation plans once there is adequate ceasefire window and access to safe locations to rescue around 3,000 Indian nationals, MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will meet the UN Secretary-General in New York on the situation in Sudan | P15

No one killed 11 in Guj's Naroda village in 2002

Trial court acquits all 67 accused in the case

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA
@ Ahmedabad

ALL 67 accused, including then BJP minister Maya Kodnani and former Bajrang Dal leader Babu Bajrangi, were on Thursday acquitted by a Special SIT court in the 2002 Naroda Gam riots case in Gujarat. The riots broke out a day after 58 Kar Sevaks on board Sabarmati Express died after their bogie was set afire in Godhra.

Twenty-one years after the horrific incident, special judge Shubhada Baxi in her verdict invalidated a journalist's sting operation and Kodnani's call details as evidence.

Of the total 86 accused, 18 died during the pendency of the trial, while one person was discharged earlier by the court, reducing the count to 67.

Defence lawyer Dinesh Vaghela said they were able to successfully establish that Kodnani was present at the Assembly and the Sola Civil Hospital and not at the riot site.

Union home minister Amit Shah had testified in court in 2017, saying, "I saw Mayaben in the state legislative Assembly and at Sola Civil Hospital on that day," informed Vaghela.

Kodnani was sentenced in a different Naroda Patiya riots case in 2012, in which 97 Muslims were killed, but was acquitted by the Gujarat High Court five years ago.

A disappointed prosecution counsel Shamshad Pathan said, "Our question remains: who burned 11 people alive in Naroda village? We were upset with the government; the SIT was constituted extremely late; and we are again dissatisfied with the special court's decision today." He said they will challenge the verdict in the Gujarat High Court.

After the judgment, a large number of people outside the court raised slogans of *Jai Shri Ram*. Maya Kodnani told the local media, "truth has won."

The Supreme Court had on August 26, 2008 appointed a Special Inquiry Team to conduct the investigations and the trial began in 2010. It examined 244 witnesses under the sequential presidency of six judges.

Maya Kodnani after her acquittal in the Naroda Gam case, in Ahmedabad | PTI

An Army vehicle catches fire in Bhatadurain area of Mendhar in Poonch | PTI

JAISH HAND?

While no terror outfit has claimed responsibility, unconfirmed reports claim the People's Anti-Fascist Front, a proxy organisation of the Jaish-e-Mohammed, could be behind it

J&K TERROR ATTACK ON ARMY TRUCK KILLS FIVE JAWANS

FAYAZ WANI @ Srinagar

WITH barely a month before the G-20 meetings in Srinagar, terrorists on Thursday opened fire and threw grenades at an Army truck in the border district of Poonch in Jammu and Kashmir, killing five soldiers and critically injuring another.

The vehicle caught fire and was completely damaged. The five soldiers belonged to the Rashtriya Rifles unit and were deployed for counter-insurgency operations in the area. They have been identified as Havaldar Mandeep Singh, L/Nk Debashish Baswal, L/Nk Kulwant Singh, Sepoy Harkrishan Singh and Sepoy Sewak Singh.

The attack happened around 3 pm when the truck was moving between Bhimber Gali and Poonch in Rajouri sector. Taking advantage of heavy rains and low visibility in the area, terrorists opened fire and lobbed grenades.

Immediately after the attack, an Army contingent, the state police and the CRPF rushed to the area and launched a combing and search operation.

"Operations are in progress to locate the attackers," officials said.

Initial reports had suggested that a lightning strike may have caused the Army vehicle to catch fire.

It is the first major terror attack on security forces in Jammu and Kashmir this year and comes ahead of the important G-20 Tourism Working Group meetings in Srinagar next month.

On January 1-2, militants had killed seven civilians of the minority community in twin attacks in Rajouri's Dangri village.

INTELLIGENCE INPUTS

Former Jammu and Kashmir police chief Shesh Paul Vaid said there were intelligence inputs on thre possibility of a major terror attack in J&K in view of the G20 meetings

Bilawal to visit India for SCO meet in Goa

YESHI SELI @ New Delhi

IN what could provide some diplomatic bilateral drama in New Delhi, Pakistan's foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will visit India on May 4 to attend the Shanghai Corporation Organisation (SCO) meeting in Goa.

This will be the second in-person participation by Pakistan in an SCO meet hosted by India. The recently appointed Charge d'Affaires in New Delhi, Salman Sharif, had attended an SCO meeting in March.

"Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will lead the Pakistan delegation for the SCO foreign ministers' meet (May 4th and 5th) in Goa. The FM's participation in the meeting reflect Pakistan's continued commitment to SCO charter and processes and the importance that Pakistan accords to the region in its foreign policy priorities," said Pakistan's foreign office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahrah Baloch.

Court rejects plea to stay Rahul conviction

ERRONEOUS, SAYS CONG

"A most unfortunate and unsustainable legal decision has been upheld in an even more unsustainable and erroneous judgment of the Sessions Court," Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said

DILIP SINGH KSHATRIYA
@ Ahmedabad

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi on Thursday suffered a setback as he failed to get a judicial stay on his conviction in a 2019 criminal defamation case over his Modi surname slur.

Rahul was recently disqualified as a member of the Lok Sabha after a trial court in Surat found him guilty and sentenced him to two years in prison. A stay on his conviction would have nullified his disqualification.

A Surat sessions court, which was hearing his appeal, said Rahul "should have been more careful with his words that would have a large impact on people's minds". Additional Sessions Judge Robin Mogera found merit in former BJP minister Purnesh Modi suing Rahul for defamation, saying "such defamatory remarks would have certainly harmed his reputation and caused him pain and agony in society."

Judge Mogera said the Supreme Court had, in a number of pronouncements, held that the powers accorded under Section 389 (1) of the CrPC to suspend/stay the conviction "requires to be exercised with caution and circumspection", else it would seriously impact public perception.

The court also claimed that Rahul had "not made out any case to suspend the conviction recorded against him".

About imposing the maximum sentence of two years on Rahul, the court stated, "it appears from the record that all opportunities for cross-examining witnesses were accorded to the appellant and thus I do not agree with the contentions of... appellant being deprived a fair trial."

The Congress said it will challenge the order. "Let me assure you that the judgement will be challenged in accordance with law in the very near future," Congress leader Abhishek Manu Singhvi said.

BJP's national spokesperson Sambit Patra hailed the verdict, saying, "It proves the law is equal for everyone."

Karnataka HC rejects DKS plea against CBI probe

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE @ Bengaluru

THE High Court of Karnataka on Thursday upheld the sanction granted by the state government to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to probe the alleged corruption charges against KPCC president DK Shivakumar.

Justice K Natarajan passed the order while dismissing a petition filed by Shivakumar in 2020, questioning the permission given by the state government to the CBI to conduct a probe against him. The case involves inter-state investigation and huge benami transactions.

The state government gave sanction to the CBI on September 25, 2019, to probe the case under Section 6 of the Delhi Special Police Establishment Act as the assets of the accused are outside Karnataka.

The CBI contended that the accused has no right to choose or say which investigating agency should investigate him and consent under Section 6 of the Act does not require reasons to be passed while granting sanction.

CAUTIOUS BROS

DK Suresh too files papers for Kanakapura seat

DEVARAJ B HIREHALLI @ Bengaluru

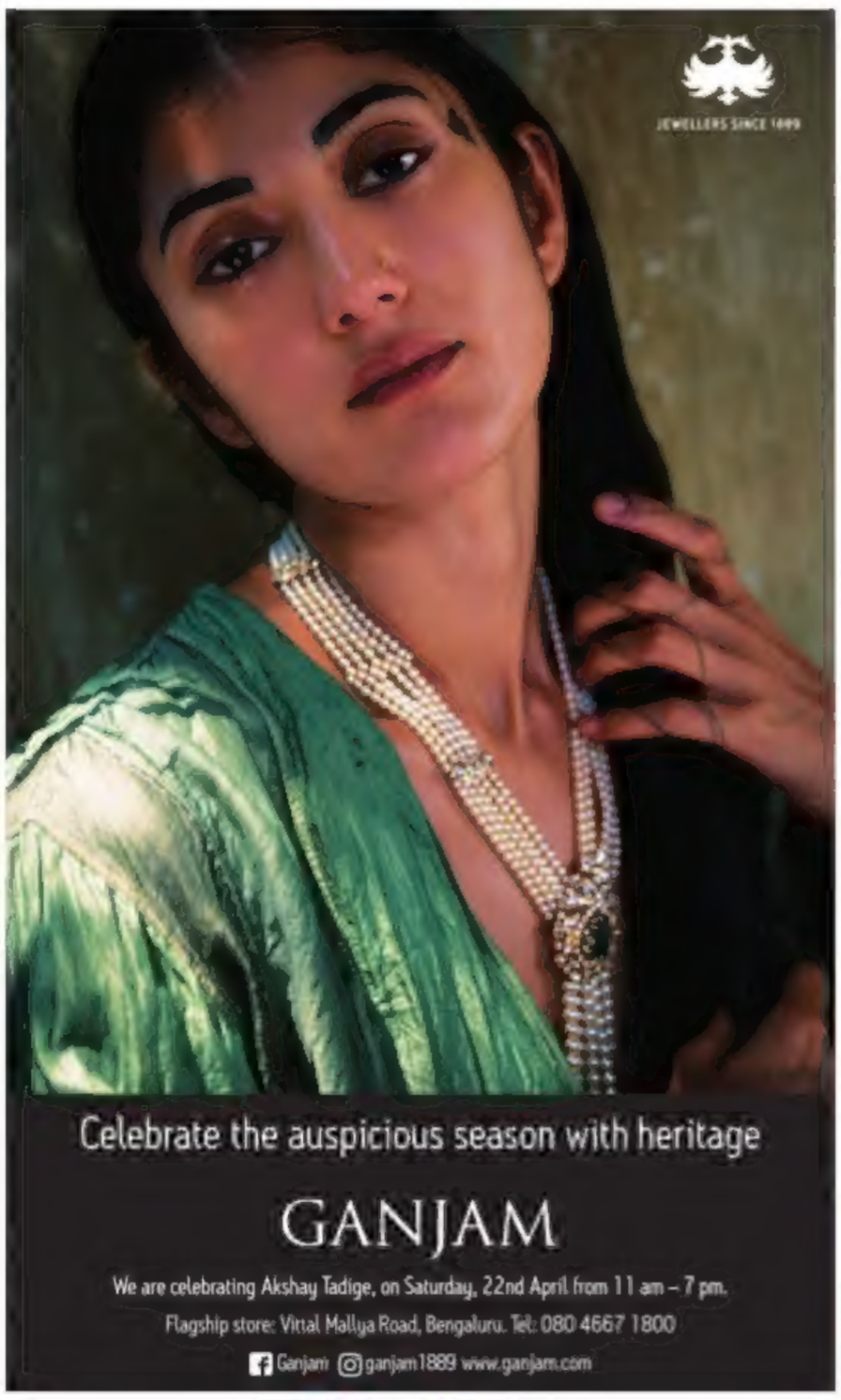
KPCC president DK Shivakumar and his younger brother and MP DK Suresh appear to be more cautious now if Thursday's developments in the Congress party are taken into consideration.

After Shivakumar filed his nomination papers on Monday for the Kanakapura seat, Suresh filed his for the same seat on Thursday. While Shivakumar filed two sets of papers, Suresh submitted three sets. Revenue Minister R Ashoka is contesting as a BJP candidate from Kanakapura and Padmanabhanagar constituencies.

"Shivakumar's nomination papers are in order. But there seems to be a conspiracy to reject them. Hence, I too filed papers as a Congress candidate for the Kanakapura seat. Since election officers are from the government, they can do anything on instructions from their bosses. Hence, we have taken a precautionary measure," Suresh told reporters. "Wait and watch the further developments," he added. Earlier in the day, Suresh was in Channapatna where he accompanied Congress candidate Gangadhara, who filed his nomination papers. In a surprise move, Suresh rushed to Kanakapura within hours and filed his nomination papers. P4

PART OF STRATEGY, SAYS DKS

KPCC chief DK Shivakumar said the strategy behind his younger brother DK Suresh filing his nomination for Kanakapura seat will unfold in a couple of days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